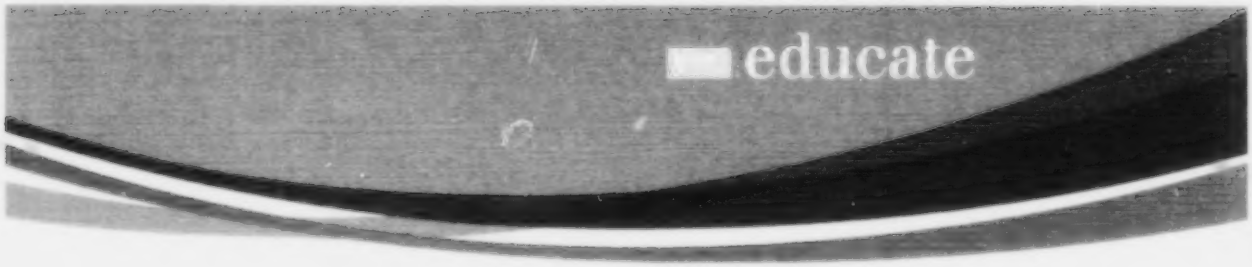

PROMISING PRACTICES IN FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT EDUCATION

Case Studies No. Two

Bishop Routhier Elementary School
Cardston Junior High School

August 2008

Alberta Education

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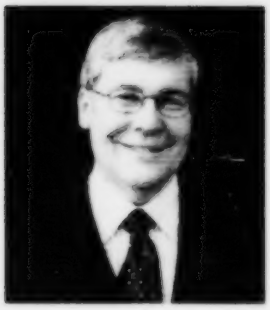

Honourable Dave Hancock, Minister, Alberta Education

The Government of Alberta and First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) community leaders recognize the importance of education in improving lifelong opportunities for Alberta's FNMI children and youth.

Through collaboration with FNMI communities and organizations, education authorities, school boards and others, we are working together to ensure our FNMI students will have the knowledge, skills and confidence to complete their elementary and secondary education and successfully participate in post-secondary programs.

Education is committed to annually reviewing promising practices in Alberta schools that demonstrate positive outcomes for FNMI students and sharing these approaches with the broader education community.

The *Promising Practices in First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education: Case Studies* report is the second in a series of case studies that identify the factors for student success which include: teaching strategies that are appropriate to Aboriginal learner needs, curriculum that reflects FNMI cultures and perspectives, effective counselling and outreach, and a school environment that encourages student, parent and community engagement.

Alberta's education community will benefit from the results of this report. This will foster dialogue on First Nations, Métis and Inuit education, including the sharing of promising practices where good results have been achieved.

Dave Hancock, Q.C.
Minister

PROMISING PRACTICES IN FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT EDUCATION

Case Studies No. Two

Bishop Routhier Elementary School
Cardston Junior High School

Compiled by
First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services Branch
Alberta Education

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This document is intended primarily for:
System and School Administrators
Alberta Education Executive Team and Managers

And may be of interest to:
Teachers
Parents
Education Stakeholders
Community Members

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report, *Promising Practices in First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education: Case Studies No. Two* is part of the ongoing work of Alberta Education's, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services Branch to identify school based practices that support a collaborative education system and positive outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students. This second publication of in-depth case studies involves two Alberta schools, Bishop Routhier Elementary School of Northland School Division No. 61 and Cardston Junior High School of Westwind School Division No. 74.

This report provides a literature review of research of promising practices in Aboriginal education followed by a background section providing an overview of the case studies project. The literature review provides the foundation for the report as it sets out five common themes identified in the research:

1. Parent and community engagement
2. Language and cultural programming
3. Teachers, instruction, curriculum and resources
4. Professional development
5. Individual student supports

School profiles and a summary of individual school performance data provide a backdrop for the review of the practices employed in each of the schools. Successful strategies and commonalities of approach are presented in the context of the five research themes. Although approaches varied in each school, the following were common to both:

1. First Nations, Métis and Inuit Parent and Community Engagement

In reviewing the individual practices employed by each school to develop positive, supportive relationships with FNMI parents and community, three common elements emerged.

Firstly, in both schools, the principal and teachers had primary roles in the development of enhanced relationships with their FNMI parents and community. Bishop Routhier School did not have an on-site FNMI liaison worker; however, the expectation was that all teachers were to develop positive relationships with parents. The principal at Bishop Routhier considered his role as being the primary liaison with parents, the community and its leadership. Teachers were expected to be involved in the community and develop relationships with parents and community members. In contrast, Cardston Junior High School had an on-site FNMI Liaison Counselor. In this school environment, the FNMI Liaison Counselor was very active in assisting staff to develop relationships with FNMI parents and community. The FNMI Liaison Counselor had a prominent role in assisting the principal with his interactions with FNMI parents, and the leadership of the Kainai First Nation.

Secondly, in both communities there was strong support for the school. In Bishop Routhier School the community and its leadership expressed a common desire for improvement within the school. This resulted in cooperative support and increased financial assistance to the school. Students attending Cardston

Junior High from Kainai First Nation did so by choice. Parents were supportive of the school, its goals and approaches since many of them had attended the school themselves. These parents wanted their children to attend the school and had high expectations for their children's education.

Thirdly, the relationship between FNMI parents and their respective schools went beyond the formal to a more personal level. The creation of an informal, welcoming and respectful atmosphere was evident in both schools. Many of the staff members at Bishop Routhier School resided within the community there during the school week and participated in community activities, as a result they were well-known to the community members.

Teachers at Cardston Junior High School were long-term members of the community, knew FNMI families, and in some instances taught the parents of current students. The presence of a highly respected Elder (FNMI Liaison Counselor) from the community on the school staff also helped strengthen the relationship between the community and the school.

2. *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Language & Cultural Programming*

Both Bishop Routhier School and Cardston Junior High School provided all of their students with opportunities to appreciate the richness of First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture. In addition, both schools provided cultural opportunities for students through structured FNMI cultural programs; a Grade 2-6 Métis Studies Program at Bishop Routhier and a Blackfoot Studies Program at Cardston Junior High School. Both schools were supportive of providing students with access to a First Nations language. Cardston Junior High offered Blackfoot as a second language program. Bishop Routhier School indicated that they wanted to introduce a Cree Language program in the near future.

3. Teachers, Instruction, Curriculum/Resources

Teachers

The principals of both schools felt it was important to attract teachers who were committed to improving outcomes for FNMI students, had high expectations for student success, were flexible, and demonstrated the ability to develop positive relationships. The principal of Bishop Routhier School actively recruited teachers who had demonstrated a positive history of working with FNMI students. Cardston Junior High School attributed much of its success to experienced teachers and an exceptional on-site FNMI Liaison Counselor. Teachers at both schools received considerable professional development in FNMI education over the years which provided a valuable framework for teaching FNMI students.

Instruction

The principals of the two schools indicated that for their schools to be truly responsive to the needs of their First Nations, Métis and Inuit students it was necessary to go beyond standard procedures to develop relationships, attain

cultural knowledge, provide a sense of belonging, encourage literacy, and promote academic success. Both schools demonstrated high expectations for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and a commitment to go beyond the ordinary to enhance student success.

Both schools focused on literacy. Bishop Routhier School emphasized reading as part of its core curriculum and set additional time aside for a one-to-one Precision Reading Program. Cardston Junior High School stressed reading in all classes, including those students working on modified programs.

Cardston Junior High School provided for individual student differences through co-operative learning, small working groups, a project orientation to assignments, and differentiated instruction. The school also provided a modified program in Language Arts and Math to help students in these core subjects. Similarly, Bishop Routhier School supported individual differences through differentiated instruction, assessment for learning practices and maintaining components of Northland School Division's Kîkway Kikiskîyîtîn Project. The Kîkway Kikiskîyîtîn Project was a performance assessment project within Northland School District that will be discussed later into the report.

Curriculum/Resources

Both schools purchased a wide variety of FNMI resources for their libraries and classrooms. These resources were available to all students for leisure reading and were incorporated into literacy programs and other curriculum areas. Bishop Routhier School did not have a central library but supported classroom libraries that contained a significant number of FNMI resources. Both schools were supportive of provincial initiatives to infuse FNMI perspectives into curriculum.

Professional Development

An underlying strength of both schools was the experience and knowledge of their respective staff groups and their ongoing FNMI professional development. The principal of Cardston Junior High noted that First Nations, Métis and Inuit education was a topic on each staff meeting agenda and each school-based professional development day. Bishop Routhier School provided specific opportunities for professional development in FNMI education. Both schools placed an emphasis on learning more about approaches that would benefit their FNMI students. Both schools also accessed professional development opportunities related to FNMI education offered by Alberta Education, the Alberta Regional Consortia and other organizations.

Individual Student Supports

Both schools provided wrap-around services to assist individual students and families. These school environments were committed to the overall well-being and success of their students. Some services were easily identified and described whereas others were evident through observation of the overall school environment.

Both schools had regularly scheduled open access to Elders. Cardston Junior High had a well respected on-site Elder (FNMI Liaison Counselor), while Bishop Routhier Elementary School had easy access to elders due to its community location and support.

Planning for smooth student transitions was a focal point for each school. Cardston Junior High paid particular attention to the transition from Grade 6-7 for students from Kainai First Nation. Initial meetings with parents, the on-site FNMI Liaison Counselor and school staff were designed to support transitioning students. Bishop Routhier School paid particular attention to early transitions from home to school with a strong emphasis on pre-school programming. In addition, Bishop Routhier School identified the transition from Grade 6-7as a major concern that will be addressed with the expansion and opening of a new school in 2009.

Both schools were very aware of the need to provide coordinated services and supports to students to mitigate the impact of poverty and other social issues. Bishop Routhier School provided coordination of services and direct supports to students and parents through the *Educational Enhancement Project* with the Métis Settlements Child and Family Services Authority. The school provides many low cost or no cost benefits to students including a lunch program. Cardston Junior High School provided support for FNMI families and students through their on-site FNMI Liaison Counselor and services available within the community of Cardston and Kainai First Nation.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT SCHOOL COMMUNITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT PROJECT

In March 2003, Alberta Education developed the First Nations, Métis and Inuit School-Community Learning Environment Project to assist school jurisdictions in developing approaches to improve outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students. Implementation of the project occurred during the 2004-05 school year with the objective of addressing the needs of FNMI learners in 17 pilot schools across Alberta. A collaborative approach among school staffs, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit parents, Elders, jurisdiction leaders, Alberta Education, and First Nations communities resulted in the implementation of a variety of innovative practices. The *First Nations, Métis and Inuit School-Community Learning Environment Project - Promising Practices Report (2007)* highlighted these innovative practices in light of current FNMI educational research.

2.2 PROMISING PRACTICES IN FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT EDUCATION - CASE STUDIES

Subsequent to the release of the *First Nations, Métis and Inuit School - Community Learning Environment Project - Promising Practices Report (2007)*, Alberta Education released the first in a series of reports entitled *Promising Practices in First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education - Case Studies of Two Alberta Schools* in 2005-06. The two case studies schools were pilot schools from the initial First Nations, Métis and Inuit School - Community Learning Environment Project. This report set the stage for an ongoing approach of Alberta Education's, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services Branch to report the promising practices of two Alberta schools each year.

Promising Practices in First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education: Case Studies No. Two will outline the promising practices identified for Bishop Routhier Elementary School and Cardston Junior High School based on studies of these two schools conducted during the 2006-07 school year.

2.3 SCHOOL IDENTIFICATION METHODOLOGY

The identification of the two schools for this promising practice report was based on available data and the recommendations of FNMI Services managers and school jurisdictions. The decision was made to focus on schools with a significant self-identified FNMI student population that had demonstrated positive Provincial Achievement Test results.

The criteria for selection were as follows:

- Number of FNMI Students - consideration was given to the number of self-identified FNMI students enrolled within each school.

- FNMI Student Demographics - the identified schools should serve significantly diverse FNMI student populations. The identification of a junior high school environment was an important goal for this report.
- Provincial Achievement Test Outcome Data - the schools were identified based on positive outcomes across the widest number of subtests on the June, 2006 Provincial Achievement Exams at the Grade 3, 6 and 9 levels.

- FNMI Services and School Authority Recommendation - the authors relied on recommendations from FNMI Services Managers and School Authorities.

2.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature available on factors that contribute to FNMI student success in school has increased over the past few years with some common themes emerging. For the purposes of this review these common themes are organized into the following five areas:

- First Nations, Métis and Inuit parent and community engagement
- First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural & language programming
- Teachers, instruction, curriculum and resources
- Professional development
- Individual student supports

2.4.1 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Parent and Community Engagement

The literature regarding FNMI student success in school suggests a need for strong working partnerships among the school, the parents and the broader FNMI community. In a study of 162 small high schools in Alaska, Kleinfield (1985) noted that the successful schools had strong alliances between teachers and the community. Successful schools exhibited strong teacher/community partnerships, agreement regarding the theme for the educational program, enterprising teaching staff, and a central office that encouraged adapting schooling to meet local needs.

Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) stated that the influence of the family is a large determiner in First Nations, Métis and Inuit student success. The authors write that: "Educators have come to know that there is a positive correlation between success at school and positive family influence, support, and relationship". (pg. 9)

Bazylak (2002) concurs, stating that "Without family involvement Aboriginal students are less likely to succeed in school". (pg. 139) Bell (2004) in his study of ten Aboriginal schools in Canada also sums up this reoccurring theme in the following statement:

> *"The establishment of effective working partnerships between schools, parents and communities is dependent on the formation of a climate of relational trust. Additionally, previous education experiences of parents or community members strongly influence the potential of the school to build effective partnerships. This is particularly significant, given that many Aboriginal communities have had negative experiences in which education was used as a tool of assimilation". (pg. 35)*

Agbo's (2007) in a study of school-community relations in a Canadian, First Nation community school highlighted the complexities of this relationship. Results indicated that for collaborative school-community relationships to thrive, the school must empower the community through genuine discussions that foster collaboration and respect for multiple perspectives. Agbo also notes that schools must be reformulated in accordance with a different, non-Eurocentric referent if they wish to improve First Nations parents and community involvement.

Schools that can develop positive, supportive relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents/community are more likely to produce positive outcomes for their First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. The development of such relationships, especially in more traditional First Nations environments, requires the school to go beyond a Eurocentric view of education to truly empower the First Nations community and demonstrate a respect for multiple perspectives in education.

2.4.2 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Language & Cultural Programming

The *Common Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs*, of the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education states, "The outcomes for Aboriginal as a Second Language are based on the assumption that language will be taught and used while teaching cultural content," and "Communicative proficiency is the goal of Aboriginal Second Language programs. The statements stress that language teaching should not be taught in isolation of cultural understandings as language is the expression of culture. Battiste (2000) supports the notion that First Nations language and culture are inextricably intertwined and that teaching either aspect in isolation is not ideal. The author goes on to note that Aboriginal languages are the basic media for the transmission and survival of Aboriginal consciousness, cultures, literatures, histories, religions, political institutions, and values. They provide distinctive perspectives on and understandings of the world..." (199).

FNMI culture and language programs are common in Alberta schools with the majority of programs being cultural in nature, not reflecting the inextricably intertwined programming suggested by Battiste (2000). A number of schools offer second language instruction in Aboriginal languages such as Cree and Blackfoot, these programs tend to provide some cultural context for the language instruction. Considerable effort has been directed to develop resources and support the implementation of these programs.

Several schools in the province offer FNMI cultural experiences for their entire student population which are tied to specific celebrations such as National Aboriginal Day which is held on June 21st of each year. Isolated cultural experiences for students, like the example noted above, require careful planning to ensure these experiences are integrated into relevant curriculum areas to expand the knowledge base of all students.
Demmert (2001) noted that: "Studies conducted in the past 30 years collectively, provide strong evidence that Native language and cultural programs—and student identification with such programs—are associated with improved academic performance, decreased dropout rates, improved school attendance rates, decreased clinical symptoms, and improved personal behavior." (pg. 16)

The presence of culture and language programs in schools is seen as less alien and people in the community are more inclined to become involved in the education process (McLaughlin, 1992).

There is considerable research indicating the positive effects of Aboriginal bilingual and immersion programs on FNMI students. Several case studies in Alaskan communities with schools offering bilingual or bicultural classes revealed satisfied parents, excellent student attitudes and exceptional test scores (McBeath, McDiarmid, & Shepro, 1982).

Stiles' study (1997), of four indigenous language programs in New Zealand and Hawaii also demonstrated similar results. Students developed a greater sense of their heritage and identity. There was a decrease in student dropout rates and students performed better on tests.

Schools that provide meaningful language and cultural programming for their FNMI students capitalize on a valuable positive practice supported by current literature. It is also evident in the literature that language and culture are intrinsically intertwined and school programming should reflect this reality.

2.4.3 Teachers, Instruction and Curriculum/Resources

Teachers

As is the case with all students, classrooms that offer FNMI students with engaging learning experiences provide greater opportunities for success. The key component is the teacher. Bazylak (2002) notes that teachers who are able to build strong, healthy relationships built on trust and mutual respect play a

significant role in the success of their students. This importance is echoed by Welnechenko and Horsman (1998) in their study of factors that contribute to FNMI success in school in Grades 6 to 9. They maintain that: "relationship-building is a prerequisite to a positive classroom environment." (pg. 12)

Cleary and Peacock (1998) describe successful teacher behaviors that are effective for FNMI students. Some examples include the need to build trust; using humor; providing situations that yield small successes; making personal connections with students and using highly engaging, activity-based learning.

McBride & McKee (2001) in reviewing some highly successful school jurisdictions in British Columbia noted that those districts encouraged teachers to reach out to the FNMI community, recognize cultural diversity within the school culture, and to have expectations for FNMI students in keeping with all other students.

Teachers with low expectations for their First Nations, Métis and Inuit students are seen as having a detrimental impact on the success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. Digman, Mroczka, and Brady (1995) note that low teacher expectations and counseling of FNMI students into vocationally oriented curricula have been identified as factors contributing to student attrition. In a recent study of successful FNMI high school students, Bazylak (2002) notes: "the participants revealed high teacher expectations as a factor that encouraged their success in school but qualifies this by indicating that the teacher needed to ensure there was room for flexibility in their expectations". (pg. 147)

In addition to the successful characteristics explained above, research also suggests that FNMI teachers can play an important role in the educational success of FNMI youth. Mackay and Myles (1995), in a discussion of First Nations, Métis and Inuit student retention and dropout rates, noted that: "schools in which Native students enjoy a high rate of success are those with principals who actively promote strategies for maximizing the academic success of all their students. The principals of such schools have successfully recruited Native teachers and/or assistants." (pg. 174) In another study of teacher's perceptions of the integration of FNMI culture into the high school curriculum, Kanu (2003) notes the unique contribution of First Nations, Métis and Inuit teachers /assistants toward meaningful integration of FNMI perspectives. The author suggests that provincial governments collaborate with faculties of education to emphasize the importance of training and hiring FNMI teachers.

Schools that hire teachers who have high/flexible expectations and are able to build strong, healthy relationships with their students built on trust and mutual respect have a greater chance of success in the education of their FNMI students. In addition to the successful characteristics noted above, research suggests that FNMI teachers can play an important role in the educational success of FNMI youth.

Instruction

Demmert (2001) states that successful classroom teachers are able to organize their classes and adjust their teaching strategies in a way that motivates, engages, and challenges students to learn. An often unrecognized factor that influences these organizational skills and teaching strategies is the cultural context in which learning takes place.

In discussing more traditional First Nations communities, Ingalls, (2006), notes that: "Culture plays an important role in influencing a child's learning process and the skills that are learned. American Indian students' cultural heritage often conflicts with mainstream school practices." (pg. 25)

Other researchers have looked more specifically at instructional factors that have a positive influence on student achievement. Brancov (1994) suggests that an informal classroom organization, culturally relevant material and group-work produce positive results. McCarty (1991) suggests that changing the classroom learning environment to support open-ended questioning, inductive/analytic reasoning, and student participation in a cultural context, increases student participation. In addition, flexible furniture arrangements, group-work, shared locus of control by teachers and pupils, cooperative learning, collaborative group work and increased opportunities for dialogue all have been identified as having a positive impact.

Garrett (2003) offers the following suggestions for addressing cultural discontinuity of Native American students in schools:

- Introduce more opportunities for visual and oral learning styles
- Use culturally relevant materials when possible
- Respect family and tribe-related absences
- Invite Native American mentors, such as Elders from the community
- Encourage peer tutoring and cooperative group learning approaches to emphasize cooperation and sharing
- Practice inter-group competition (rather than individual competition) in the classroom
- Stress short-term goals oriented more to the present with traditional Native students
- Model behaviors and skills, with an emphasis on personal choice, to help Native American students distinguish which behaviors are appropriate for which situation

Garrett further advises education professionals working with Native youth to determine: "the degree of cultural commitment; whether the youth comes from a reservation or rural or urban setting; and what tribal structure, customs, and beliefs are relevant to the situation in order to determine the presence and magnitude of cultural discontinuity." (pg. 233)

Ingall's 2006 study of educational practices in a traditional Native American community school outlines a list of commonly used teaching methods that were incompatible with this population and cites the reasons for this incompatibility.

For example, the author notes that answering a question may be interpreted as being boastful or competitive, especially when another student had failed to answer the question correctly or not at all.

Poirier (2007) and Berger (2006) conducted studies in Northern Inuit communities to further demonstrate the incongruity of competing worldviews around Inuit educational success. Their studies conclude that educators must be aware of the competing cultural views that exist in classrooms and mitigate their impact without eroding the cultural uniqueness of the students being educated.

Powers (2005) study of cultural discontinuity also supports the previous research and links this to a safe and meaningful learning environment for older students.

Safe schools with supportive, relational teachers that provide meaningful learning opportunities for FNMI students provide the best overall environment for FNMI student success. Classrooms that are flexible and student focused provide the foundation for student success. In addition, researchers encourage educators to carefully examine conflicting norms between school cultures and FNMI cultures especially in more traditional settinas.

Resources

FNMI cultural knowledge and perspectives in the school curriculum and among teachers, has been identified as a significant factor in student success. Binda, 2001 & McAlpine, 2001 advocate for the inclusion of FNMI cultural perspectives across school curricula and teacher education programs. This sentiment is echoed by Kelting-Gibson (2006) in a discussion of the "Indian Education for All" initiative in Montana. The study states that American Indian students: "still attend schools where they do not see themselves reflected in the school's guiding principles, in the curriculum, or even in their own classrooms," (pg. 204)

Considerable work has been undertaken in Alberta in order to provide classroom teachers with culturally appropriate FNMI content across the curriculum. Currently, the infusion of FNMI perspectives into Alberta Education's Programs of Study is underway. In addition, the Aboriginal Studies 10/20/30 program provides high schools in Alberta with a unique opportunity to provide meaningful, culturally relevant programs to all school authorities across the province.

Kanu's 2005 study of the integration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture into the high school curriculum, endorses the current initiative in Alberta stating; "Curriculum development units must include Aboriginal culture, content, issues, topics and perspectives as an integral part of the school curriculum in every subject area." (pg. 12) Aikenhead and Huntley (1999)

further suggest that teachers who want to help FNMI students through the integration of FNMI perspectives into the school curriculum must be provided with the appropriate instructional resources to do so.

Kanu (2006) undertook a small in-dept study involving 31 urban grade nine First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in two social studies classrooms, one classroom being an integrated pilot class the other a control group. The study was designed to identify:

a) the most effective ways to integrate Native cultural knowledge and perspectives into curriculum,
b) the impact such integration on achievement, class attendance, and school retention, and
c) critical elements of instruction that appear to affect academic achievement, class attendance and school retention.

Assistance was provided to the pilot teacher in integrating First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives into:

a) student learning outcomes,
b) instructional methods and strategies,
c) learning resources and materials,
d) assessment strategies, and
e) underlying curriculum philosophy.

The author found that:

- First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in the pilot class significantly out performed the control group in academic achievement and demonstrated a broader understanding of social studies content, higher level thinking, and improved self-confidence,
- no differences in physical attendance and regularity although differing reasons for attendance in both groups, and
- no apparent connection between student attrition and the integration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives.

The author further identifies the following critical elements of instruction:

- Increased teacher capacity, "suggesting that successful integration requires sensitive caring teachers who are knowledgeable about Native issues and cultures and value them sufficiently to integrate them into school curriculum on a consistent basis." (pg. 133)
- The identification of First Nations, Métis and Inuit student learning outcomes for each unit and integrating these outcomes at the lesson planning stage.
- The integration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit teaching methods - most notably a) the use of story, b) guest First Nations, Métis and Inuit speakers, c) field trips to First Nations communities, d) discussion circles.

- The integration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives into resources appeared to promote breadth and depth of understanding of curriculum content and higher cognitive skills.
- Some assessment strategies, such as the use of individual journals, seemed to be more effective than others.
- The development of a learning environment that created opportunities for First Nations, Métis and Inuit student voice and where students felt they were treated with respect.

The thoughtful infusion of FNMI culture, issues and perspectives across the curriculum and access to appropriate instructional resources to support this infusion are integral to student success. The systematic approach to building teacher capacity in FNMI education is a critical support to this infusion.

2.4.4 Professional Development

Current research in FNMI education recognizes that the majority of teachers feel ill-prepared to meet the emerging demands regarding the education of FNMI students. Starnes (2006) in discussing lessons learned as a non-Aboriginal person teaching First Nations children on the Chippewa-Cree reserve in northern Montana noted;

> *"The first (lesson) is how very little we know about the ways Native American children learn. We don't recognize the chasm that exists between their needs and our traditionally accepted curricula and methods. The second is how difficult it is for even the most skilled and dedicated white teachers to teach well when we know so little about the history, culture, and communities in which we teach - and when what we do know has been derived from a white education. In such cases, solid teaching skills, good intentions, hard work, and loving the kids just aren't enough. There is too much we don't know about teaching Native American children and what we don't know definitely hurts them." (pg. 2)*

Although there is an increase in culturally appropriate content available to teachers there has been little research on teachers' perceptions of the integration of FNMI cultural knowledge and perspectives into school curriculum. Kanu (2003) in a study of ten high school teachers' perceptions of the integration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural knowledge and perspectives into the teaching of the Manitoba high school curriculum noted that:

> *"Although these teachers were unanimous in their agreement that the social studies curriculum was assimilating Aboriginal students through omission or token additions of Aboriginal perspectives, they unwittingly contributed to this process of assimilation by allowing the curriculum topics, not Aboriginal issues/perspective/s/, to remain at the center of their teaching. The teachers perceived integration as occasionally adding Aboriginal perspectives, where convenient, to a curriculum that remained largely Eurocentric." (pg. 6)*

Kanu (2005) provides ten recommendations to assist policymakers and educators to successfully integrate First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives into curriculum, the first recommendation being that;

> *"School and faculties of education should provide opportunities for all teachers, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal alike, to learn about Aboriginal culture, issues, and perspectives. This is best done through pre-service teacher education program and in schools, through professional development opportunities for practicing teachers and the utilization of the expertise of Aboriginal community members. In both routes, priority should be given to educating teachers about Aboriginal issues, Aboriginal pedagogical practices and social interaction patterns, particular ways that varying groups of Aboriginal students best learn, background knowledge about Aboriginal students in teachers' classrooms, and support systems for Aboriginal student learning in the public school system." (pg. 12)*

In discussing the impact of the "Indian Education for All" legislation in Montana, Kelting-Gibson (2006) supports Kanu's (2005) recommendations. Kelting- Gibson states that as they begin to implement the legislation educators "will need a strong program of professional development that emphasizes both gaining knowledge about the tribes and developing the strategies necessary to infuse that knowledge into classroom instruction." (pg. 205) The author goes on to support the idea of the long term approach to this professional development gap as a more vibrant program of pre-service education.

To be successful, schools require access to effective professional development programs that engage teachers in meaningful experiences regarding FNMI cultures, issues, and perspectives.

2.4.5 Individual Student Supports

Planning for student transitions and ongoing services to individuals within the school setting are important factors to FNMI student success. Reyhner (1992) in reviewing research regarding drop out rates of FNMI students noted that dropout prevention included support services outside of the classroom from school administrators and counselors who work closely with parents. Schools across Alberta provide a service safety net to assist students with a wide variety of issues ranging from frequent transitions, to issues of poverty and school alienation. Approaches include extensive transition planning, on-site counseling and social work, leadership and mentorship programming and the utilization of a holistic approach to education.

Elders

The involvement of Elders to assist staff members, students and families has become increasingly common in Alberta schools. Schools have found community Elders to be of great value in sharing cultural knowledge, acting as positive/non-stereotypical role models, assisting staff and students to understand and mitigate the effects of the cultural discontinuity referred to by

Garrett (2003) and providing direct assistance to individual students and families. Kanu, (2005) identified Elders as a great source of cultural, community and family information as well as assisting individual students improve their behavior. Auger (1997) noted that:

> *"Just as there are many roots forming the foundation of one tree, so are there many Elders, each one distinct in his or her own right and with his or her own knowledge, forming the foundation of Sakaw Cree traditional education. Through lifelong experience, our Elders are our knowledge-carriers; through their wisdom and spiritual insights, they are our knowledge definers." (pg. 332)*

Many Elders hold highly respected positions because of their earned wisdom. They are considered to be the knowledge keepers, making them master teachers of the values and mores of FNMI children.

Transition Planning

Many FNMI students struggle with transitions from one educational level to the next; from rural to urban settings; from one school to another and the initial transition from home to early childhood programs. St. Germaine, (1995) linked poor high school completion rates of Aboriginal students in America to obstacles faced during the transition to these schools. The author suggests that a cultural discontinuity exists for students schooled in their own distinctive culture and then placed into a school system of the majority culture whose values are different. If the resulting clash of cultures continues, the student may feel forced to choose one culture at the expense of the other.

In Alberta, there is evidence to support this notion especially where FNMI students attend on-reserve schools for elementary and junior high school and then are moved to a provincial school for the high school years. Wilson (1991) observes that FNMI students often face prejudice, isolation, low expectations of teachers, and an unsympathetic system. St. Germaine (1995) provided educators with a number of promising practices that would increase successful transitions some of the more significant recommendations were to:

- avoid large comprehensive high schools;
- encourage positive teacher-student interactions;
- recruit more FNMI teachers;
- promote active learning strategies where students are encouraged to interact with peers, instructors, and their environment;
- use a culturally relevant curriculum;
- use assessment for learning approaches ;
- hold high expectations; and
- increase parental involvement.

The Australian education system, similar to the Alberta system, is seeking appropriate strategies to enhance the learning and teaching of FNMI students. Dockett (2004) in a study of successful transitions to school of young Aboriginal students in the *Australian Starting School Research Project,* notes that Aboriginal children and families approach this transition as not merely a one-

way journey towards something better, but a period of two way interactions ensuring that the child's culture is not left behind. Dockett identifies a number of elements in schools that support this first transition from home to school. They include:

- a visible Aboriginal presence at the school;
- opportunities to express and maintain their Aboriginal identity;
- strategies to invite families and communities into the school and value their involvement;
- flexibility to encourage family-school connections;
- respect for Aboriginal families and the strengths they embody;
- access to mainstream educational curricula, complemented by opportunities to engage with Aboriginal languages and culture;
- high expectations of the learning capabilities of Aboriginal children;
- flexibility of organization;
- access to appropriate health services; and
- opportunities to view school as a worthwhile and positive place.

Mentorship Programs

Jackson (2003) highlighted the positive impact of structured mentoring programs on Native American college students that connected advanced Native American students with beginning students. The author found that structured mentoring programs had the potential to mitigate the potentially negative influences of friends and provided students with role models for reconciling the conflicting pressures inherent in developing a bi-cultural identity.

Issues of Poverty

FNMI students in Alberta are often faced with issues associated with poverty that could impede their success at school. School administrators, counselors, FNMI liaison workers and school-based social workers, are well aware of these impacts and many schools go beyond a narrow definition of education to include assist students and families. St. Germaine (1995) in reviewing dropout rates among American Indian and Alaskan Native students concluded that a significant factor in the high drop out rate, beyond cultural discontinuity, was the conflict caused by maintaining societal arrangements that produce substantial poverty within a nation of affluence and concentrate such poverty in certain groups, including American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Sense of Belonging

An important factor in individual student success in school is the need to feel that they are part of or have a place in the school environment. Essentially an individual needs to feel a sense of belonging. Powers (2005) notes that: "a lack of interpersonal relationships with school personal puts American Indian students at a disadvantage because those social bonds are critical to fostering a sense of belonging to school that leads to students' confidence in their own academic abilities and availability of educators to provide academic support."

Sherman & Sherman, (1990) make a case for the development of school environments that are personal in nature, with small class and program size, low pupil-teacher ratios, program autonomy, and a supportive school environment to decrease student attrition.

Reyhner (1992) suggests that FNMI students leave school less frequently when they participate in extra-curricular activities. Students participating in these activities, especially sports when excessive travel is not required, are more engaged. Reyhner goes on to suggest that it is essential that schools working with FNMI students need to recruit teachers that take an individual interest in their students and are supportive and caring in nature.

Whitbeck, 2001 and Coggins, 1997 note, when classroom environments are inviting and respectful of FNMI cultural values, students are more likely to be successful. A significant factor to student success is creating a classroom where students believe they belong.

Elders, transition planning, mentorship programs, and approaches that mitigate the effects of poverty and develop a sense of belonging are examples of wrap around services that support FNMI learners.

3.0 SCHOOL #1: BISHOP ROUTHIER SCHOOL

Jurisdiction: Northland School Division No. 61

3.1 SCHOOL PROFILE

Bishop Routhier School serves students from grades K-6. The school is located 53 kilometers from High Prairie and is part of Northland School Division No. 61. The student population consists of approximately 114 FNMI students and 19 staff. At the time of this review a total of 38 students at Bishop Routhier were considered to have moderate to severe learning disabilities. All students were from the Peavine Métis Settlement. Junior high students from Peavine were bused to High Prairie for their junior and senior high school years. Bishop Routhier School is scheduled to expand its program to include the junior high school grades in the near future. It is hoped that this change will help address some of the issues around bussing and retention of students at the junior high school level.

The school is located on the Peavine Métis Settlement, a community that is proud of its diverse cultural background. The predominant languages on the settlement are English and Cree. The leadership in the community consists of one settlement leader, four councilors and a five-person local school board committee. The chairperson of the Peavine School Board Committee is also a member of the Northland School Division's Corporate School Board. The Community is very sports-oriented and has competitive teams in a number of sports including hockey and baseball. In recent years, the community has greatly increased its support to Bishop Routhier School.

Bishop Routhier School had undergone significant changes in recent years highlighted by a renewed commitment by the community and a new school administration. The leadership of the community, the school district and the new principal have taken proactive steps to improve the learning environment to support teaching and learning. These steps include a more cooperative approach to discipline, a focus on teaching, improvement of attendance and the creation of a safe and caring environment. There had been a significant decrease in discipline related issues due to the increased community involvement.

The majority of the school staff resided in the community during the week but a few had permanent housing outside the community. During the compilation of this report, two teachers lived outside the community and commuted to work on a daily basis. The administration had recruited teachers with knowledge and experience in teaching FNMI students from other Northland School Division schools. Two teachers had taught at Bishop Routhier School for a number of years.

The school building is an older facility that will be replaced during the 2008-09 school year. The kitchen was used to support a snack and lunch program for students and the gym was used by the community on an ongoing basis.

The principal indicated that parents at Bishop Routhier School valued education. The overall view of residents of Peavine Métis Settlement was that education was a necessary tool in today's changing world. Members of the community were active in local business. Some individuals owned private businesses both on the Peavine Settlement and in neighboring communities. The community was very supportive of the school and invited the school staff to community events and activities. The school staff was very active in the community, attended sporting events, cultural and family activities and felt valued by the community.

3.2 FIRST NATIONS, METIS AND INUIT STUDENT OUTCOMES

Students at Bishop Routhier School participated in the Provincial Achievement Test program at Grades 3 and 6. Multi-year trend reports indicated strong growth over the past four years at the Grade 3 level and growth at the Grade 6 level over the past two years. Prior level of achievement results indicated that Grade 6 students at Bishop Routhier, achieved at a level consistent with projections based on their Grade 3 Provincial Achievement Tests results.

3.2.1 Provincial Achievement Test Results

2005 - 2006 Grade 3 Results

Bishop Routhier School posted extremely high participation rates for English Language Arts and Mathematics (100%) at Grade 3.

In addition, Grade 3 students reaching the acceptable standard (student writing) were above the provincial achievement average in both Mathematics and English Language Arts. Results at the Standard of Excellence (students writing) in both Mathematics and English Language Arts were below the provincial averages.

2005 - 2006 Grade 6 Results

Provincial Achievement Test participation rates (66% - 86%) for Grade 6 students at Bishop Routhier School were below the provincial average. Students reaching Acceptable Standard (students writing) were above the provincial average in English Language Arts, Mathematics and Science. Students reaching acceptable standard (students writing) were slightly below the provincial average in Social Studies. In all subjects, Grade 6 students at Bishop Routhier School scored below the provincial average at the standard of excellence.

3.3 POSITIVE PRACTICES

3.3.1 FIRST NATIONS, METIS AND INUIT PARENT/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Leadership of Peavine Métis Settlement

- Actively supported the school.
- Hired a director to assist with an after school recreation program.

- Provided extra funds to the school to purchase resources.

Bishop Routhier School Staff

- Most staff lived within the community during the school week.
- Are active within the Peavine Métis Settlement, attended functions, sporting activities, cultural and family events.
- The Principal was very willing to go beyond the confines of the school to meet and chat with parents.
- The Principal was available to parents at any time to discuss their child or issues with the school.
- The Principal and teaching staff were the primary liaisons with the parents and the community; Bishop Routhier did not have a First Nations, Métis and Inuit liaison.
- Initially, to establish rapport and commitment to the school, the current principal met with parents by knocking on doors, sharing information, identifying issues, and asking for parental support for the school.
- All staff (including the bus driver) took personal responsibility for the safety of the students.

The School Environment

- The school was seen as a major community center and community programs were supported by the administration of the school.
- The school operated a homework night every Wednesday night which coincided with School Board meetings, general parent meetings and other programs.
- The school building was open for students and parents to come into the building prior to school opening in the morning.
- Parents were encouraged to remain at the school after they dropped off their children for the day.
- Parents were encouraged to drop into classes and talk to teachers.
- Parents could come to the school and contact their children at any time.

3.3.2 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Language and Cultural Programming

- Although Bishop Routhier School provided students with cultural programming, the leadership of Peavine Métis Settlement indicated that the school needed to focus on excellence in student outcomes.
- The school had an active culture program that focuses on providing students with cultural activities and events.
- Students went beyond the school and the settlement (field trips) to learn more about Métis culture.
- A locally developed Métis studies program was provided to students in Grades 2 through 6.
- Local community members and community Elders provided students with first hand knowledge of the local history, culture and connections to the heritage of the settlement.
- School administration was planning to hire a qualified Cree Language teacher to build a quality long-term Cree Language program.

3.3.3 TEACHERS, INSTRUCTION AND CURRICULUM/RESOURCES

Teachers

- When recruiting teaching staff, an effort was made to attract staff with a positive history of working with FNMI students.
- Many teaching staff either taught for the principal in other schools or were known by the principal.
- Teachers were expected to be actively committed to students.
- Teachers were encouraged to hold high expectations for students.
- There was an expectation that teachers would be active in the community to develop positive relationships with parents, students and community members.

Support Staff

- Support staff at Bishop Routhier was seen as a key element in assisting student learning, especially in reading.
- The majority of support staff had post secondary education.
- All support staff lived in the community and were well aware of student family histories and the realities of the community.

Instructional Strategies and Resources

- Literacy was a major area of focus, with considerable time and resources devoted to improvement in reading.
- The school provided students with increased access to computers to develop keyboarding skills.
- Bishop Routhier School used differentiated instruction within classrooms to support student learning.
- The school used the Scholastic Guided Reading Series and developed a Precision Reading Program for all students.
    - Precision Reading is a one-on-one instructional activity that was developed by Dr. Rick Freeze, Professor of Inclusive Special Education at the University of Manitoba, Faculty of Education.
    - All staff participated in the guided reading program
    - The program operated daily for 40 minutes.
- The school utilized a number of ongoing assessment strategies including the Jerry Johns Inventory and the Gage Reading Test to assist in establishing the student's functional grade level.
- Bishop Routhier School did not have a central library, all library materials were in individual classrooms for ongoing student use.
- The school attributed some of its academic success to the Kîkway Kikiskîyîtîn Project developed by Northland School Division as part of a division wide AISI project.

The goals of this project were to:

- promote the established pattern of continuous improvement in student learning.
- increase the number of Grades 3, 6 and 9 students that score at the acceptable level or above on the Provincial Achievement Tests in English, Language Arts and Math.
- establish and entrench an effective process for continuous improvement of instructional practices of teachers.
- embrace assessment for learning as a tool to increase academic achievement.

Key Strategies of the Kîkway Kikiskîyîtîn Project were as follows:

- The formation of teacher teams,
- Training in general curricular and assessment strategies,
- In-service for team members on Language Arts and Math assessment practices and procedures.
- Assistance to teacher teams in the creation of test instruments, rubrics, exemplars and guides.
- In-service was provided to all Grade 1-9 teachers in Math and Language Arts assessment practices.
- Language Arts and Math assessment in-service documents were developed to serve as guides and instructional resources for Grades 2-7.

3.3.4 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Northland School Division provided some on-site consultant support and funding to support ongoing professional development.
- The school decided the themes of its Professional Development Program to address school goals.
- Bishop Routhier School had eight professional development days during the school year. Some were full days and others were half day workshops.
- Professional Development topics over the past few years have included FNMI education and specific instructional strategies.
- Staff was encouraged to attend additional professional development opportunities offered through the Northwest Learning Consortium and other organizations.

3.3.5 INDIVIDUAL STUDENT SUPPORTS

- An after-school recreational program sponsored by the Peavine Métis Settlement provided a wide variety of recreational opportunities for students.
- Community Elders supported individual students and provided connections to Métis heritage and local history.

- A vital support to individual students at Bishop Routhier School was provided by the school staff. An underlying connectedness seems to exist among staff, parents and the community in making a difference for students on an individual/personal level.

The Educational Enhancement Project

- The Educational Enhancement Project was a joint project between Bishop Routhier School and Métis Settlements Child and Family Services Authority.
- The project's mission was to enhance children's quality of life and maximize their learning potential through involvement and interventions within the student's social system.
- Interventions included services and supports for the student, parents/caregivers, teaching staff, and the community.
- Supports included educational services, psychological services, speech and language services, occupational therapy, medical services and community involvement.
- A main focus was on building bridges between home-life and school-life, involving parents in children's progress and developing overlapping goals and interventions.
- Students in the program quickly understood there was a strong relationship between the school and home and felt the support and consistency.
- The intended outcome of this program was a strong emphasis on the importance of education, and sharing of resources and insights into the child's well-being.
- The project had a central coordinator who was situated at Bishop Routhier and oversaw daily case management of each child in the program.
- The majority of children in the program lived in Peavine Métis Settlement and attended Bishop Routhier School.

4.0 SCHOOL #2: CARDSTON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Jurisdiction: Westwind School Division No. 74

4.1 SCHOOL PROFILE

Cardston is situated in the low foothills of southwest Alberta, approximately 25 km north of the Canada/US border. To the north, Cardston borders the Kainai First Nation, the largest reserve in Canada. Forty kilometers to the west of Cardston is Waterton Lakes National Park.

Cardston Junior High School is a part of Westwind School Division No. 74. The school is culturally diverse with about a third of its students residing on nearby First Nations communities. At the time of this review, Cardston Junior High School had a total student enrolment of 313 students, 92 of which were FNMI students. The school is the pride of the community and Westwind School Division. This was quite evident in its overall appearance and welcoming atmosphere. The school has taken steps over time to make FNMI students feel that they are an important and valued group in the school. The majority of residents of Cardston are members of the Church of the Latter Day Saints.

The school principal indicated that the majority of parents of students attending the school are very supportive. Parental involvement and support was evident and resulted in 70-80% attendance at Parent - Teacher interviews and school events. A large number of First Nations parents, who previously attended the school as students, chose to send their children to Cardston Junior High School because of their personal positive experiences. First Nations students from Kainai First Nation attend Cardston Junior High School under a tuition agreement between Westwind School Division and the Kainai Board of Education. Other FNMI students from the Cardston community also attend the school.

4.2 FIRST NATIONS, METIS AND INUIT STUDENT OUTCOMES

Cardston Junior High School has a long history of success with FNMI students and was recommended for this research by Westwind School Division and FNMI Services Education Managers working in southern Albert

Cardston Junior High School participates in the Provincial Achievement Test program at the Grade 9 level. At the time of this review, disaggregated FNMI results at the school level was not available. The results of these tests represent the entire Grade 9 student population.

4.2.1 Provincial Achievement Exams
2005-2006 Grade 9 Results

Multi-year reports indicate that participation rates for Cardston Junior High School were slightly below the provincial average in all four subject areas. Grade 9 students reaching the Acceptable Standard (students writing) were above the provincial achievement averages in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science.

Results at the Standard of Excellence (students writing) in Social Studies, Mathematics and English Language Arts were above the provincial averages and results for Science were slightly below the provincial average.

Prior Level of Achievement Results indicated that Grade 9 students at Cardston Junior High writing Provincial Achievement Tests in June 2006, achieved at a level consistent with projections based on their Grade 6 Provincial Achievement Test results in English Language Arts and above projections in Mathematics.

4.3 POSITIVE PRACTICES

4.3.1 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Parent/Community Involvement

A good relationship existed between the school and the FNMI community. First Nations parents felt comfortable in contacting teachers to discuss the progress of their children and the teachers felt comfortable in contacting the parents.

One of the underlying strengths at Cardston Junior High School was having a well respected First Nations Elder on staff at the school as the FNMI liaison counselor. The Elder's primary goal was to assist school staff in developing their own relationships with the FNMI community and providing critical advice to the administration and teaching staff regarding situations involving FNMI students, families and the broader community.

Cardston Junior High School Staff

- The school philosophy recognized that cultural differences existed within its student population, that it was important to be sensitive to these differences, and to treat all students equally.
- The staff had been at the school for a number of years and in many cases had taught the parents of current FNMI students.
- Individual staff members knew First Nations families on a personal basis.
- Communications between the school staff and the FNMI parents was characterized as being excellent and built on a foundation of respect and understanding.
- Prior to the parent teacher interviews, the principal called FNMI parents and invited them to attend.
- With the increase in computer access by FNMI parents, the school had begun to provide up-to-date student information online. Student attendance and grades were posted online and weekly reports were emailed to parents.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Community

- A number of First Nations parents previously attended the school and from their own positive experiences, chose to send their children to this school.
- The First Nations community invited the school staff to attend local functions and family activities.
- There were four First Nations positions on the School Council reserved for members of the First Nations community. If no one from the community volunteers for these positions the school recruited First Nations parents.
- The FNMI parents were very supportive of the school and looked to the school to work collaboratively with them to find solutions that were in the best interests of their children.

FNMI Liaison Counselor

- The FNMI Liaison Counselor was highly respected in both the school and the FNMI community.
- A significant component of the FNMI Liaison Counselor's role was to provide school staff with advice regarding appropriate protocols with the FNMI community and facilitate positive relationship building between staff and parents.
- In addition, the FNMI Liaison Counselor accompanied the school's Family Liaison Councilor (and occasionally the school administrator) on parent home visits.
- The FNMI Liaison Counselor was very familiar with the FNMI families and the current realities of the community.

4.3.2 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Language and Cultural Programming

- A Blackfoot language/culture program was offered every day as an option available to all students.
- Resource people/Elders from the First Nation community assisted the school with cultural presentations and cultural events.
- The school hired a First Nations teacher who taught all students. This teacher also taught the Blackfoot language and culture program with the help of the FNMI Liaison Counselor.
- FNMI culture/perspectives were included in the school program and activities where there was a natural fit with the school activity or celebration.

4.3.3 Teachers, Instruction and Curriculum/Resources

Teachers

- The majority of the teachers resided in the community of Cardston.
- New teachers to the school were provided with a cultural awareness workshop by the FNMI Liaison Counselor and the First Nations teacher to provide them with an understanding and background of the FNMI community, families and students.

- Teachers in the school consulted with the FNMI Liaison Counselor when dealing with the FNMI community and parents.
- The FNMI Liaison Counselor provided teachers with assistance in integrating FNMI perspectives into the school and classroom program.
- Teachers were encouraged to become aware of and sensitive to the unique emotional needs of their FNMI students. For example: The close ties among families and extended families may result in significant grief at the loss of an extended family member such as a great aunt whom they have known as a grandmother in Blackfoot Kinship.
- In most cases new teachers to the school were from Cardston, had grown up attending schools in Cardston and had developed ongoing relationships with the local FNMI community.
- Teachers at Cardston Junior High School had remained at the school for a number of years and were very familiar with the FNMI community and individual families. In many cases the teachers had taught the parents of current students.
- Some staff at the school had personal ties to members of the FNMI community and attended family functions such as weddings, and funerals.

4.3.4 Instructional Strategies and Resources

- Cardston Junior High School used elements of co-operative learning, small working groups, a project orientation to assignments, and differentiated instruction to support student learning.
- The school's approach to all students was based on a philosophy of high expectations and individual student accountability.
- The school was committed to early assessment of student abilities and had developed assessment strategies to identify educational gaps and to provide appropriate interventions.
- Complementary courses offered at the school included Native Culture and Blackfoot Language programs.
- The school manually disaggregated its FNMI performance data at the school level to evaluate the impact of programming.
- The school's differentiated instructional approach provided some modification to student programs within the regular classroom as well as some pull-out modified programs.
- There was a reading component in all classes except Mathematics.
- Modified programs were available (with parental permission) in Language Arts and Mathematics at grades 7, 8 and 9. Consideration was given to extending the modified program to all core subjects.
- Students, parents and teaching staff were involved in decision making regarding placement in modified programs. The goal of the placement approach was to have students and parents feel that they were contributing to the process in a meaningful way.
- Within the pull-out, modified program:

    - Literacy skill development was an area of significant focus.
    - Students could transition back to the regular program and were not "locked into" the modified program.
    - The program followed the regular curriculum where possible.

- Students underwent ongoing testing to ensure the appropriateness of the program.
- The individual student program was developed at the student's performance level (example: If a student is operating at the grade five level in Mathematics the program is offered at this grade level).

The school had purchased appropriate FNMI teacher resources to support the curriculum and the school planned to increase their FNMI library collection.

4.3.5 Professional Development Programs

- Cardston Junior High School provided focused professional development days for staff on FNMI educational topics.
- The school was well aware of the need for ongoing FNMI professional development, given that this population was a significant component of the overall school population.
- Time was allocated to FNMI education during every school-based professional development day.
- The FNMI Liaison Counselor had time set aside at each staff meeting for a teaching on FNMI culture.

4.3.6 Individual Student Supports

Transition Planning

Students Transferring from the First Nations School

- An initial meeting of school staff, parent/guardian, student, and the FNMI Liaison Counselor took place to discuss the student's background information, school programming and individual student supports. The intent of the meeting was to improve understandings and open lines of communication. Academic achievement was not a factor in determining acceptance into Cardston Junior High School. All students, regardless of academic performance, were welcomed into the school.

All Grade 6 Students

The following approaches were used by Cardston Junior High School to support their new grade 7 students:

- Counseling was available to all students.
- FNMI students were made aware of the on-site FNMI Liaison Counselor.
- The school was divided into small cross-graded character education groups called "Prides" containing 14 to15 students and led by a staff member. Students in the *Prides* had lockers near one another and met with their staff leader twice per month for 30 minutes. The staff leader was responsible for maintaining a connection with the students and assisting them whenever possible.

Character Education Program

Cardston Junior High School was committed to providing all students with a safe environment where cultural and religious diversity was celebrated. The school had introduced a Character Education program designed to assist all students to develop the virtues of empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance and fairness. Since the time of this review, the school has expanded its character education program to include a *Pyramids of Intervention* program that focuses on eliminating behaviors and attitudes that limit students from experiencing success. The program goal was to create a sense of greater personal student responsibility for learning and to increase parent involvement in their child's learning.

FNMI Liaison Counselor

A major student support at Cardston Junior High School was a very active and involved FNMI Liaison Counselor who was well connected to individual students, parents, staff and the general FNMI community. The FNMI Liaison Counselor's role included sharing cultural knowledge, being a positive role model, assisting staff and FNMI students to understand and mitigate the effects of the cultural discontinuity referred to by Garrett (2003). The FNMI Liaison Counselor also provided direct assistance to individual students and families. The strength of this position went well beyond the position itself and was rooted in the individual and her reputation within the school system and the First Nations Community

5.0 SUMMARY

The principals of Bishop Routhier School and Cardston Junior High School were of great assistance in identifying what they felt were the significant positive practices in their respective schools. Staff from Alberta Education conducted individual principal interviews based on an interview guide (Appendix A) developed specifically for this project. Principals were given the interview guide in advance and were encouraged to provide written responses to accompany the face-to-face interviews which were taped to assist with the accuracy of responses. The following practices were applicable to both schools.

5.1 FIRST NATIONS, METIS AND INUIT PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In reviewing the individual practices employed by each school to develop positive, supportive relationships with FNMI parents and community, three common elements emerged.

Firstly, in both schools, the principal and teachers had primary roles in the development of enhanced relationships with their FNMI parents and community. Bishop Routhier School did not have an on-site FNMI liaison and the expectation was that all teachers were to develop positive relationships with parents. It was evident that the principal at Bishop Routhier viewed himself as having the primary role as liaison with parents and the community. Teachers were expected to be involved in the community and develop relationships with parents and community members. Cardston Junior High School had an on-site FNMI Liaison Counselor who was very active in assisting staff in developing relationships with FNMI parents and community. The FNMI Liaison Counselor had a prominent role in assisting the principal in his interactions with FNMI parents and the leadership of Kainai First Nation.

Secondly, in both communities, there was strong support for the school. In Bishop Routhier School the community had rallied around a common desire for improvement which resulted in cooperative support and increased financial assistance to the school. Students attending Cardston Junior High from Kainai First Nation did so by choice. Parents, many of whom had attended the Cardston Junior High School themselves, wanted their children to attend the school and had high expectations. Parents were supportive of the school, its goals and approaches.

Thirdly, relationships with FNMI parents in both schools seemed to go beyond the formal to a more personal level. Teachers at Cardston Junior High School were long-term members of the community and in some instances had taught the parents of current students. The presence of a highly respected Elder from the community on the school staff as the FNMI Liaison Counselor provided a bridge between the community and the school. Many of the staff at Bishop Routhier School resided in the community during the school week and were active in the community. Staff was well known by community members from interactions both at the school and in the community. The creation of an informal, welcoming and respectful atmosphere was evident in both schools.

5.2 FIRST NATIONS, METIS AND INUIT LANGUAGE & CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

Both Bishop Routhier School and Cardston Junior High School provided all students with opportunities to appreciate the richness of FNMI cultures. In addition, both schools provided cultural opportunities for students through structured FNMI Culture programs (a Gr.2-6 Métis Studies Program at Bishop Routhier School and a Blackfoot Studies Program at Cardston Junior High School). Both schools were also supportive of providing students with access to a First Nation language. Cardston Junior High School offered a Blackfoot as a second language program. Bishop Routhier School was hoping to introduce a Cree language program in the near future.

5.3 TEACHERS, INSTRUCTION, CURRICULUM/RESOURCES

Teachers

The principals of both schools felt it was important to attract teachers who were committed to improving outcomes for FNMI students, had high expectations, were flexible and demonstrated the ability to develop positive relationships. The principal of Bishop Routhier School actively recruited teachers who had a demonstrated positive history of working with FNMI students. Cardston Junior High School attributed much of its success to experienced teachers and an exceptional on-site FNMI Liaison Counselor. Teachers at both schools had received a great deal of professional development in FNMI education which had provided a valuable framework for their work with FNMI students.

Instruction

The principals of the two schools indicated that for their schools to be truly responsive to the needs of their FNMI students it was necessary to go beyond standard procedures to develop relationships, attain cultural knowledge, provide a sense of belonging, encourage literacy, and promote academic success. Both schools demonstrated high expectations for FNMI students and a commitment to go beyond the ordinary to assist students to be successful.

Both schools focused on literacy. Bishop Routhier School emphasized *reading* as part of the core curriculum and set aside additional time for the one-to-one Precision Reading program. Cardston Junior High School stressed the importance of reading in all classes and provided access to an increased focus on literacy in modified programs.

Cardston Junior High School addressed individual student differences through elements of co-operative learning, small working groups, project orientation to assignments, and differentiated instruction. In addition, Cardston Junior High School provided a highly developed modified program in Language Arts and Mathematics for students who were unable to cope with the regular curricula. Similarly, Bishop Routhier School supported individual differences through differentiated instruction, assessment for learning and maintaining components of Northland School Division's Kîkway Kikiskîyîtîn Project.

Curriculum/Resources

Both schools had purchased a wide variety of FNMI resources for their libraries and classrooms. These resources were incorporated into literacy programs and other curriculum areas. Bishop Routhier School did not have a central library, but supported class-based libraries that contained a significant number of FNMI resources. Both schools were supportive of provincial initiatives to infuse FNMI perspectives into the curriculum.

5.4 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

An underlying strength of both Bishop Routhier School and Cardston Junior High School was the experience and knowledge of their respective staff groups and the ongoing FNMI professional development of staff members. The principal of Cardston Junior High noted that FNMI education was a topic on each staff meeting agenda and a part of each school professional development day. Bishop Routhier School provided specific opportunities for professional development in FNMI education. Both schools place an emphasis on learning more about strategies that would benefit their FNMI students. Both schools accessed professional development opportunities related to FNMI education offered by Alberta Education, the Alberta Regional Consortia and other reputable organizations.

5.5 INDIVIDUAL STUDENT SUPPORTS

Both Bishop Routhier School and Cardston Junior High School provided wrap around services to assist individual students and families. In addition, both school environments were committed to students and their overall wellbeing and success. During the review, some services to students were easily identified and described whereas others were evident in observations of the overall school environment. Both schools had open, regularly scheduled access to Elders. Cardston Junior High had a well respected FNMI Liaison Counselor, while Bishop Routhier Elementary School had easy access to Elders due to its community location and support.

Planning for student transitions was an area of focus for each school with Cardston Junior High paying particular attention to the transition from Grade 6 to 7 for students from Kainai First Nation. Initial meetings with parents, the on-site FNMI Liaison Counselor and school staff were designed to support effective student transitions. Bishop Routhier School focused on early transitions from home to school with a strong emphasis on pre-school programming. In addition, Bishop Routhier School had identified the transition from Grade 6 to 7 as a major concern.

Both schools were very aware of the need to provide coordinated services and supports to students within their schools to mitigate the impact of poverty and other social issues. Bishop Routhier School provided coordinated services and direct support to students and parents through the *Educational Enhancement Project* partnership with Métis Settlements Child and Family Services Authority. In addition, the school provided many low cost or no cost benefits to students, including a lunch program. Cardston Junior High School provided support for FNMI families and students through the on-site FNMI Liaison Counselor and services available within the community of Cardston and Kainai First Nation.

POSITIVE PRACTICES IN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

SCHOOL INTERVIEW DOCUMENT

Name of School: _____ Date: _____

Principal: _____ Interviewed by: _____

CURRENT STUDENT POPULATION

	ECS		Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6	
	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI
# Of Students														

Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12	
FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	- FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI

SCHOOL PROFILE

1. Please describe the community surrounding your school and the "wider school community" if students travel to your school from outside your immediate community?

2. Could you describe your FNMI community?

3. How is your school viewed by these communities?

4. How is your school viewed within the School District?

5. Describe your teaching staff in general: general teaching experience, how long at the school.

6. Can you talk a little about your support staff: experience, etc?

7. Can you tell us about your school facility and resources?

8. Do you receive any targeted funding for FNMI programming?

CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

9. How would you describe your student body (general ability, mobility, special education needs, and other factors that define your school population)?

10. What are your student's families like (socio – economic status, support for school, and other factors that define your school population)?

FNMI STUDENT OUTCOMES

11. Could you talk about your PAT results over the past five years especially in terms of your FNMI student population?

12. Is there data, in addition to your PAT results, which you would like to include in this study?

POSITIVE PRACTICES

School Vision *(If there is a written school vision/mission statement please attach a copy)*

13. Could you talk a little about your school's vision for the education of FNMI students?

14. Would you say that this is a common vision among staff and the school community?

    a. If so, what were the key elements to developing this common vision?

Barriers to FNMI Student Success

15. What were some initial barriers to success for your FNMI students and how did you address these barriers?

FNMI Parent/Community Involvement

16. What strategies have you employed to actively involve FNMI parents in your school? What are the most successful?

17. How do you involve the broader FNMI Community in the life of your school? What methods are the most successful?

18. Are there specific approaches to reporting to parents that have been particularly successful?

FNMI Cultural and Language Programming

19. Could you describe the FNMI language programming at your school?

20. What cultural programs are offered at your school? Are they demonstrations or are they participatory in nature?

21. Are there opportunities for FNMI /Non-FNMI students to participate in Cultural programming offered at the school?

22. How is the FNMI community involved in these programs?

Teachers

23. Do you have any staff positions specifically designated to assist FNMI students and families? (i.e. Aboriginal Liaison Worker)

24. Could you provide an overview of the duties of this/these positions?

25. How have these positions impacted FNMI students?

26. Do you have any FNMI teaching staff? Support staff?

27. What are the important characteristics you look for when you are adding new staff to your school?

Instruction

28. What specific approaches to teaching and learning have proven to be the most successful for you in improving FNMI student outcomes?

29. Are there any specific programs that you have used that have been successful with your FNMI students? (Literacy Programs, Aboriginal Studies)

30. Are there specific assessment strategies the school has employed that are particularly successful with your FNMI students?

31. What is the school's approach to homework?

32. What is the overall impact of these initiatives on your FNMI students?

Curriculum

33. What strategies have you used to infuse FNMI perspectives into the curriculum in your school?
34. What has been the impact at your school of Alberta Education initiatives in the infusion of FNMI perspectives into the new Social Studies Curriculum?

35. Do you offer students a specific FNMI studies course?

36. What is the overall impact of these initiatives on your FNMI students?

Resources

37. Has the school purchased Aboriginal resources for use in the library and classrooms?

38. How does the school use these resources?

39. Have these resources made a difference to your FNMI students?

Professional Development Programs

40. Has your staff been involved in an FNMI professional development program? If so could you please describe it and the topics you have included in the program?

41. What approach to FNMI Professional Development do you feel has the most positive long term impact on staff?

Individual Student Supports

42. Does your school have any Leadership or Mentorship programs for your FNMI students? If so could you describe them and comment on their impact.

43. Do you have a specific approach to provide counseling services to your FNMI students? (i.e. Elder counseling/ FNMI social worker)

44. Do you have a specific Career Development strategy for your FNMI students? If so could you describe it and comment on its impact?

FINAL COMMENTS

45. Is there anything you would like to add at this time (something we have missed) or a need to clarify or expand on any topic we have discussed?

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